

**West Mojave Plan
Task Group I
Green Tree Inn, Victorville
April 4, 2001**

Attendees

Task Group: Marge Balfour, Ray Bransfield, Paul Condon, Michael Connor, Clarence Everly, Jeri Ferguson, Sharon Girod, Art Gleason, Mark Hagan, Tom Hepburn, Gerry Hillier, Manuel Joia, Becky Jones, Peter Kiriakos, John W. Kittell, Paul Kober, Charles LaClaire, Brian Ludicke, Lilia I. Martinez, David Matthews, Steven Morgan, Lisa Northrop, Gail O'Neill, Lorelei Oviatt, Doug Parham, Bob Parker, Daniel Patterson, James Peterson, Danny Rakestraw, Mike Rauschkolb, Tim Read, Mari Schroeder, Randy Scott, Courtney Smith, Donna Thomas, Barbara Veale, Ed Waldheim, Marcy Watton, Marcia Wertenberger, Martin Wilkins.

West Mojave Team: Bill Haigh, Larry LaPre, Ed LaRue, Valery Pilmer

Introduction

Bill Haigh opened the meeting at 9:45 AM.

Updates:

- **Stipulation and Proposed Order - Center for Biological Diversity, et al. Lawsuit:** Bill Haigh summarized a meeting attended by BLM staff, and members and staff of the Boards of Supervisors for Inyo, Kern, and San Bernardino Counties. One issue discussed was the need to complete the West Mojave Plan as soon as possible. Randy Scott, San Bernardino County, indicated that some of the elected officials expressed concern that the counties were not consulted during the CBD settlement process and did not have an opportunity to be involved. Elected officials continue to be concerned about the impacts on private property and would like to see the Plan resolved and completed in an expedited way. Steve Morgan, City of Ridgecrest, stated that Kern County will be much more active in the future in watching what occurs.
- **Ft. Irwin Expansion:** Bill Haigh announced that the Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) Preliminary Review of the effects of the proposed Fort Irwin expansion has been completed. (This is one of several reports which the December 21, 2000 Fort Irwin legislation requires the Army, BLM and/or FWS to prepare.) Ray Bransfield (FWS) indicated that FWS is waiting for clearance to provide the report to the public. Ray said that the report is very general in nature and does not describe specific actions which must be taken to offset the impacts of the expansion. More specific detail will be provided in later documents. In response to questions on how mitigation measures for the Ft. Irwin expansion will be developed, Haigh said that the measures will be developed through the

West Mojave planning process. The West Mojave Plan's environmental impact statement will evaluate land use allocation questions -- that is, the environmental effects of changing the management of the expansion lands from that practiced under the BLM's California Desert Conservation Area Plan to Army "force on force" training. A separate EIS, to be prepared by the military, will address the on-base issues.

Route Designation:

Bill Haigh discussed the approach being used for route designation. A schedule for the release of the maps and reports prepared for each of 21 route subregions was provided. The review of the five subregions which encompass desert tortoise critical habitat -- Newberry-Rodman, Red Mountain, Superior, Fremont and Kramer -- was included as a specific requirement of the CBD settlement. This agreement requires that a CBD subregion be released for a 90-day "field check" every 45 days, beginning on February 17, 2001 with Newberry-Rodman. The release schedule for the remaining 16 subregions is organized around the schedule set for the five CBD subregions by the settlement agreement; in other words, there will be five packages of subregion reports and maps. (The time frame for implementing the Fort Irwin expansion proposal is also driving an aggressive schedule for the route designation process.)

To help meet this workload, contractors are being hired to complete the Route Designation process, perform GIS work, and complete two new wildlife surveys (rare plants and Bendire's thrasher).

The following points were made by Task Group members:

- The schedule for route designation is overly aggressive. Public members will have difficulty reviewing the routes and providing meaningful feedback. Concern was expressed that if the process is pushed along too fast, it will not be well thought out. Haigh pointed out that the time frame for completing the EIS for the West Mojave Plan is directly tied to the Fort Irwin expansion. Route designation needs to be completed quickly in order to be included within the West Mojave Plan. Haigh also noted that five of the subregions must be completed by specific dates specified in the BLM - CBD settlement agreement.
- There are accuracy problems with the maps released to date, including the route inventory, which will take time to resolve.
- Task Group 2 needs to be reconvened to provide input into the process. In response to this concern, Haigh indicated that a Task Group 2 meeting will be scheduled within two to three weeks.
- The Steering Committee needs to have significant involvement in the process.
- We need to ensure that the Fort Irwin money allocated to the West Mojave planning effort is spent in a manner that provides us with the best scientific information available. The Steering Committee should help prioritize how the funding is spent.

January 18, 2001 Task Group 1 Meeting Notes:

The meeting notes were approved as presented.

Subcommittee Proposals

Introduction:

Considerable discussion took place regarding certain unresolved issues, primarily the amount of ground disturbance that will be allowed within the DWMA's and how that ground disturbance will be calculated. The issue involved two alternative approaches: the "One Percent Cap" approach suggested by the September 1999 evaluation report, and the "No Net Loss" approach proposed last winter by the Mining subcommittee. The Task Group decided to elevate this issue to the Steering Committee for resolution.

The Task Group was again reminded that Tortoise DWMA boundary modifications can be discussed in the future, once the nature of DWMA management is firmed up.

Fencing Subcommittee Proposal

At its January 18, 2001 meeting, Task Group 1 directed Ed LaRue to work with the task group's various subcommittees and bring their recommendations to the task group for discussion. LaRue did so, and prepared a memo, dated April 4, 2001, summarizing the current status of that effort. The memo identified tortoise management prescriptions adopted by the Task Group to date, pending sub-committee recommendations to modify Evaluation Report measures or, where there has been no additional work, the original Evaluation Report recommendation. (Note: Copy of memo available upon request to West Mojave Team.)

The task group began its consideration of subcommittee proposals by addressing those made by the Fencing Subcommittee (beginning on page 11 of the April 4, 2001 memo). The following points and modifications were made:

Measure E4a: Gerry Hillier indicated that San Bernardino County would likely have a problem with this item if there was a proposal to install regulators on roads. Ed LaRue explained that this issue deals only with roads inside DWMA's. The group discussed clarifying this section and including a reference to speed regulators as possible mitigation in measure K2a. Some committee members expressed concern that the regulator issue not be buried. This section was modified to read as follows (and a reference to speed regulators was included in measure K2a):

E4a. In DWMA's, there is no current proposal to install speed regulators.

Measure K1a: In response to concerns that there should not be any delay in the construction of tortoise fencing, Ray Bransfield (FWS) provided the following suggested language:

K1a. Within DWMA's, when roads are fenced to preclude entry by desert tortoises, culverts of appropriate design and spacing to allow desert tortoises to pass under the road shall be installed. If an opportunity exists to fence a road but culverts cannot be installed at the time of fencing, the fencing should proceed because reducing mortality of desert tortoises is a more immediate need than promoting genetic interchange.

Measure K1b: The Fencing Committee's revised language for this item was acceptable to the group.

Measure K1c: Some members expressed concern that this item, as proposed, does not provide flexibility. It was acknowledged that in some cases fencing both sides of the road may not make sense. The following language was agreed upon:

K1c. Generally both sides of the road should have tortoise fencing.

Measures K1d and K1e: After discussion of the future relocation of Highway 395, the group agreed to the subcommittee's revised language for K1d and K1e (page 13 and 14 of the memo). After discussion regarding fencing Mojave Randsburg Road in order to protect the Desert Tortoise Natural Area, the group agreed to **delete the following language**, but also directed that this language be included as an alternative in the NEPA/CEQA document.

K1d. If the southern boundary of the proposed Fremont-Kramer Tortoise DWMA is expanded south to Mojave-Randsburg Road, that road should be fenced from Highway 395 to the western boundary of the DWMA.

Measure K2a: Clarification was given that this section would apply to new paved roads only, and would not prevent the repaving and repair of existing paved roads. Paul Condon expressed concern that certain subdivisions within California City could pose a problem as a court mandate exists requiring the paving of dirt roads. It was noted that the DWMA boundary around California City may need to be revisited to address this issue. Ed Waldheim said that the hardening of roads to reduce dust should not be prohibited. Mike Connor noted that the problem with paved roads in DWMA's is the speed of traffic. The following language was agreed to:

K2a. Other potential problem roads [...] The Implementation Team shall monitor tortoise mortality along these and other roads and identify measures such as fencing, culverts, signs, speed regulators, etc. to reduce or avoid unacceptable mortality levels,

K2a. In general there will be no new paved roads in DWMA's. New proposals shall be evaluated by the Implementing Team. Mitigating measures may be required.

Language regarding the need for the Implementation Team to ensure that fences and culverts are appropriately monitored was approved as shown on page 15.

Measure K5b: This measure was revised to clarify that the fencing referenced here is not tortoise fencing, but is 4-wire fencing designed to keep out dogs and people.

Mike Connor felt that there must be a paragraph dealing with fencing as an adaptive management tool, especially it's application to DWMA/urban interface issues. Becky Jones said that the Silver Lakes fence should be considered a pilot program. She suggested additional language which would give the Implementation Team the flexibility to identify other fencing projects. The group agreed to add this language to K5b. Language was changed to the following:

5Kb. Standard fencing should be installed at the interface between Silver Lakes and the Tortoise DWMA immediately west as a pilot study to minimize residential impacts to conservation areas. The Implementation Team may require fencing of other areas as deemed necessary to address threats.

Measure K6a: The group deleted the lead-in phrase that read "As per discussions with the Law Enforcement Subcommittee." The remaining language was approved subject to this deletion. The second part of this section was approved as written.

Measure K7a: The group approved the language concerning the need for signs between the Stoddard Valley and Johnson Valley Open areas. It decided that the Education Subcommittee should also review the issue relative to educational outreach. Because additional BLM staffing is called for, the group stressed the need to keep this section in mind during any funding discussion. The language for the section relative to law enforcement and education was changed to the following:

K7a. Additional law enforcement (ranger patrols) and educational outreach (recreation technicians) shall be used in concert with fencing and signs to inform the public of appropriate and inappropriate activities in conservation areas.

Measure K8a: Gerry Hillier said that he assumes the BLM rather than the county would provide the open area fencing. The need for a naming system for different types of fencing was discussed. These names need to be included in a glossary for the plan. The group agreed to use the term "standard fencing" when referencing 4-strand non-tortoise fencing. The language for this item was approved as shown except that the word "fencing" was replaced with the words "standard fencing".

K8a. Place a standard fence along pertinent portions of the western boundary of the Johnson Valley Open Area to prevent OHV use in the Ord-Rodman Tortoise DWMA to the west and to minimize use in the Cinnamon Hills.

Upcoming Meetings

Steering Committee Meeting	April 25 th at 9:30 AM
Task Group 1 Meeting	Monday, May 14 th at 9:30 AM Green Tree Inn, Victorville
Task Group 2 Meeting	Wednesday, May 2 nd at 9:30 AM Green Tree Inn, Victorville
Future Task Group 1 Meeting	Tuesday, June 12 th at 9:30 AM Green Tree Inn, Victorville